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SOLDIER AND UNIT ADAPTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The strategic operating environment that the United States Army operates in today can be characterized as uncertain with an enemy that is asymmetric. The Army's engagement in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom requires leaders and units at all levels to be able to adapt to ever changing circumstances on the ground. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances on a daily basis will allow units to survive and even thrive on this battlefield. This paper will assess the Army's training on adaptability at junior and senior leadership levels and will discuss how this adaptability helps create adaptable units. This paper will discuss historical examples, the Army Education System, training in units and developing adaptive units. Recommendations are provided to develop adaptability in leaders and organizations.

SOLDIER AND UNIT ADAPTABILITY

Adapt or Die[1]

This was the warning given by Fastabend and Simpson in their 2004 article entitled the same. The message is clear. The United States Army must adjust to the realities of today's operating environment or risk losing Soldiers and potentially battles to an ever adaptive enemy.[2] This paper will examine the definition of adaptability, discuss the current strategic environment we operate in, provide historical examples of military organizations that adapted to changing circumstances, and then recommend changes to the way the Army trains Soldiers and units to ensure our organizations adapt.

The Requirement for Adaptability and its Definition

Field Manual (FM) 3-0 states that Soldiers and leaders need to be adaptive in order to fight in today's operational environment.[3] It describes things an adaptive leader needs to be able to do, such as, exercise mature judgment and initiative and be able to learn and adapt. However, FM 3-0 does not define what it means to be adaptive. In the Army's view adaptability is only one piece of ensuring our leaders are "Pentathletes" as defined in the RETAL Report dated 16 June 2006.[4] In order to determine what the Army needs to do it is critical to define what it is we seek.

Adaptability has been described numerous ways by numerous authors. Webster's dictionary defines adaptability as, "to make suitable or fit by means of changes or modifications[5]." Adaptability can be a reaction to a challenge that requires new learning, innovation and new patterns of behavior.[6] This definition is more reactive than proactive in that it requires adapting to specific challenges as they arise. Adaptability can also be defined as the ability to change the underlying culture of an organization in order to allow it and its members to determine best courses of action as circumstances arise.[7] This definition is more comprehensive in that it requires the organization to change how it thinks and how it approaches problems vice reacting to changing circumstances.

The *Strategic Leadership Primer* defines six metacompetencies that sum up several long lists of competencies developed by the Army War College and the writers of FM 22-100. These lengthy lists were reduced to six metacompetencies: identity; mental agility; cross-cultural savvy; interpersonal maturity; world class warrior and professional astuteness. Mental agility is the metacompetency most closely associated with adaptability. It is defined as, "the ability to recognize changes in the environment; to determine what is new, what must be learned to be effective, and includes the learning process that follows that determination, all performed to

standard and with feedback[8]." The conclusion drawn from this definition is that mental agility is the ability to react to ever-changing situations by: 1) visualizing the entire problem; 2) using feedback mechanisms; 3) determining second and third order effects; and 4) constantly adjusting as situations develop.

This paper will use the definition of adaptability developed by Vandergriff. He has taken an Army centric perspective that fits well. His definition highlights individuals, organizations, future events, and acknowledges the chaotic environment we are currently operating in as discussed later in this paper. Adaptability is defined as, "the process of adjusting practices, processes and systems to projected or actual changes of environment. It includes the creation of innovative combined arms organizations, doctrine, systems and training concepts as demanded by the environment, allies, and the enemy. Adaptive solutions to complex problems in chaotic, unpredictable situations are based more on intuition than on analysis, deliberate planning and doctrine[9]." Key to this definition is constant feedback through multiple mechanisms that cause the individual to constantly reassess.

This paper will address both organizations and individuals with the realization that you cannot have one without the other. Adaptive organizations are built on adaptive leaders and subordinates[10]. For the Army, this applies at multiple levels—from Squad Leader to Chief of Staff of the Army. To build adaptive units we must develop adaptive leaders in those units, train them in various scenarios, and allow for mistakes, flexibility, and feedback. This is critical to building units that can fight and win in today's complex operating environment.

The 2005 Army Posture Statement acknowledges the requirement to grow adaptive leaders[11] and stresses the requirement to not only train our Soldiers and leaders, but to educate them.[12] Training teaches our leaders *what to think*–a paradigm more adequate when we were operating in a benign, more predictable and less dynamic environment. What the document proposes is that we teach our leaders *how to think*–a paradigm or mantra more suitable for our Soldiers to operate in uncertain conditions that will be described later in this document.[13] This leads us to believe one key to training adaptive Soldiers is education vice training.

Webster's defines education as, "development nurtured by fostering to varying degrees the growth or expansion of knowledge, wisdom, desirable qualities of mind or character by a course of formal study or instruction[14]." A critical element to the above is educating leaders vice training them. Educating leaders is the best method to ensure they are adaptive vice able to repeat multiple tasks by rote. This will allow them to further educate their units and may even effect what they train on during the limited time allocated for training. This is at the heart of Vandergriff's proposals.

The Army needs to educate leaders and their organizations on how to think vice what to think. In this way leaders retain flexibility to react accordingly. At the end of this paper I will propose methods to do this that can be adapted to multiple levels of the chain of command. These methods can foster team building and go beyond the Army standard of: task, conditions, standard. The end-state is adaptive individuals and institutions.

Before this paper discusses the operating environment, examples of how military organizations have adapted in the past, and/or solutions it is important to remember the conditions under which military organizations must adapt. Adapting military organizations for the "next war" is a difficult endeavor. Williamson Murray best described it ,

> unlike other organizations, military forces in peacetime must innovate and prepare for a war 1) that will occur at some indeterminate point in the future, 2) against an opponent who may not yet be identified, 3) in political conditions which one cannot accurately predict, and 4) in an arena of brutality and violence which one cannot replicate.[15]

This begs the question of what we are adapting for.

The Operating Environment – Current and Future

The United States Army operates globally as the United States fights the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Since the bulk of the current kinetic fight is in Iraq this paper will use examples drawn from there to describe the current environment.

"The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. The challenges in Iraq are complex. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. It is fed by a Sunni Arab insurgency, Shiite militias and death squads, al Qaeda and widespread criminality. Sectarian conflict is the principle challenge to stability. Pessimism is pervasive."[16] These are some of the opening thoughts in the Iraq Study Group Report published in December 2006. It is this type of operating environment and a similar atmosphere in Afghanistan and other areas our Soldiers face daily.

Operation Iraqi Freedom presents a complex operating environment our leaders and Soldiers must operate in on a daily basis. This is a war being fought against an adaptive enemy on his "home turf". "The occupation of Iraq is turning out to be more difficult than conquering it[17]." According to the newly developed counter-insurgency doctrine, "conducting a successful counterinsurgency requires an adaptive force led by agile leaders.[18]"

The complexity of warfare is felt by our Soldiers today. A study of junior officers during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) indicates that the roles they play daily are more complex than they were trained for in garrison.[19] One officer in the study discussed not only his role, but the role of his unit.

It is difficult to keep 18 year old guys, to take them and one second we are dodging bullets and trying to hide on the street corner and react because you got somebody in a window or a roof, and the next second you are knocking on the door, asking to search the house and you have to be polite. I think that this is a very large leadership challenge here – keeping guys focused on that; making sure that they can calm back down after brief periods of excitement.[20]

In addition to the leadership challenge above, many junior leaders are performing functions well outside their specialty. "Field Artillerymen, engineers and tankers spoke of operating as infantrymen as they conducted raids or cordon and searches. On the other hand, infantrymen spoke of functioning as engineers or civil affairs officers as they assumed responsibility for infrastructure for a sector."[21]

These comments and others in the study indicate junior leaders are doing much more then we trained them for. They are all things to all people and appear to be adapting to the situation on the ground. They are learning to live with unpredictability. They can go from a firefight to a meeting with an important sheik in one morning. They are doing this in order to accomplish their mission.

Based on these comments it appears as if Soldiers and units are adapting to the environment. However, the Army has no method to institutionalize this natural instinct to adapt and survive. This paper will make recommendations on how to best do this.

Hammes highlights the potential level of complexity in other, future wars in his 1994 article, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation". He argues that warfare is moving from a focus on maneuver to a focus on technology with an exponential increase in the number of players on the international scene.[22] International actors are beginning to supersede state actors for allegiance and loyalty. Hence fourth generation war is a series of "complex engagements fought across the spectrum of human activity. Antagonists will fight in the political, economic, social and military arenas and communicate their messages through a combination of networks and mass media."[23] The conclusion drawn is that complexity will only increase and the need for adaptive leaders and units will increase accordingly.

One paradox of the situation described above is that junior leaders are learning about adapting to changing circumstances, but senior leaders are not necessarily doing the same. If senior leaders do not develop systems to educate themselves and make adaptive training standardized throughout the Army we will continue to find situations highlighted in "The Study of Military Professions" which stated that, "the students at Leavenworth know more than their faculty[24]." Young Soldiers will begin to pressure the Army from the "bottom up" for change. "The Army can continue the momentum of change by leveraging and encouraging adaptability and

innovation, or it can allow traditional Army inertia to gradually grind down the out-of-the-box perspectives of its returning junior officers."[25] This paper advocates encouraging adaptation and innovation.

Both Great Britain and Germany attacked the question of "what are we adapting for" differently after World War I and this had a dramatic effect on how they approached the initial phases of World War II. Success or failure in adapting depends on several factors better seen with 20-20 hindsight.

Historical Examples of Adaptability

History is replete with stories of military organizations that either did or did not adapt based on their collective experiences of previous conflicts. This paper cites both Great Britain's and Germany's experiences after World War I and how they adapted or failed to adapt to meet the requirements of future wars.

Research shows there are three major differences that will allow us to understand how and why these two armies took divergent paths. To adapt to changing circumstances an army must have; innovators and leaders, a culture that encourages adaptation and innovation and a desire to learn from past experiences.[26] It is clear from the research that in the experience of Germany these three factors converged, but in the case of Britain, they did not. This is, in large part, due to their reactions to the end of World War I and what they perceived the role their Army's would play in the future.

Great Britain and Germany saw the roles of their armies in different ways after World War I. Great Britain's politicians saw the role of their army as homeland defense and protection of their colonies.[27] The predominant role for this army would not be in bloody trenches on the European mainland, but in overseas colonies. This was a throwback to earlier times when the British focused on their navy and used the army for attacks on the periphery.[28] This can be seen as a negative reaction to the horror's of World War I and was manifest in how Britain prepared her Army for the next war.

The British did not establish a committee to undertake the task of examining lessons learned from World War I until 1932. That year, The Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CISG), Lord Milne, provided guidance that allowed for a far reaching study.[29] The conclusions were very critical of the British Army in the war. However, their conclusions and recommendations did not make their way into British doctrine or into organizational reform.[30] This is primarily due to the fact that Lord Milne was followed by a series of weak CISGs who did not implement the findings[31]. Lord Milne was followed by General Montgomery-Massingberd, who was a favorite

of the more conservative elements of the army.[32] His appointment enabled him to appoint like-minded officers to key billets in the army and ensure a conservative leadership in the army for years to come. His successors were also like minded leading up to the start of World War II.

Culturally, the British Army reverted back to the good times of the Regimental system. The pervasive attitude among the officer corps was that of pre-World War I officers. Too many leaders looked upon soldiering as, "an agreeable and honorable occupation rather than a serious profession demanding less intellectual dedication than that of the doctor, lawyer or the engineer."[33] This did not foster a culture of learning or education.

This is not to say that all British officers sat on their hands between the wars. There were indeed two great British innovators between World War I and World War II. Both Liddell Hart and J.F.C. Fuller--innovators with world wide reputations. However, they went against the grain of the British army culture and were overlooked when screened for promotion or command between the wars.[34] In fact, their increasing vitriolic attacks on army leadership guaranteed that their ideas would sit on the British sideline during the critical days of 1939-1940, when their innovative ideas could have turned defeats into victories.[35]

The British experience shows an organization that: did not have innovative leaders in positions of authority, did not have a culture that encouraged adaptation, and did not want to learn from past experiences. Since these are key elements of an organization that needs to adapt it is clear the British Army was doomed to go into the next war not with "lessons learned" but with "lessons noted".

The Germans did not see World War I the same way. To them it was more of a, "thoroughly ennobling experience though which every generation should pass."[36] The Germans saw their army as an instrument that would fight on the European mainland again. These different theories of future war drove these armies in two different directions.

The German Army started looking at lessons learned during and immediately after World War I. General Hans von Seeckt as the Army Chief of Staff and then Army Commander in Chief was able to select the officer corps for the much-reduced German Army limited by the Versailles Treaty.[37] He focused on General Staff officers and was able to ensure the bulk of the 4,000 officers retained were indeed trained at the German General Staff College.[38] Right after the war he established approximately 57 different committees, formed of General Staff officers, to examine the lessons learned from the war.[39]

Culturally, the German Army was receptive to change. Many officers felt that the German Army could have won World War I. However since they lost World War I there was great motivation for change. Immediately after the war, many officers wrote books and articles critical

of German leadership, tactics and strategy.[40] This culture was facilitated by General von Seeckt who assigned over 400 officers to the lessons learned process (ten percent of the entire officer corps). Lessons learned became a large part of the German officer's existence. These culture embedding mechanisms[41] used by General von Seeckt were critical towards moving the German Army in a unified fashion into the next war.

Germany also produced its fair share of innovators. General Heinz Guderian is often cited as the German officer most responsible for innovation and the development of the blitzkrieg tactics used in World War II.[42] No doubt he had an impact, but he did not act alone. The combination of his contributions inside the system that was established by General von Seeckt and his successors ensured innovators had a place to send ideas and often put them into practical exercises. During the interwar years, leaders such as the Army Commander, General von Fritsch and the Army Chief of Staff, General Beck, had as much to do with allowing innovation as did the actual innovators.[43] These officers set the conditions for adapting by establishing and fostering a culture that welcomed new ideas and innovation. Their role was as much putting together the coalition[44] for change as it was actually implementing the changes themselves in formations.

The German experience shows an organization that: had innovative leaders in positions of authority, had a culture that encouraged adaptation and was an organization that wanted to learn from past experiences. Since these are key elements of an organization that needs to adapt it is clear the German Army was able to go into the next war with lessons learned and inculcated into their leadership.

For the United States Army today, the question becomes: do we have the conditions set to do as the Germans did and not slide into the trap the British did? Do we have the innovators, culture, and ability to dig into lessons learned to change our way of thought? Even if we have the right leadership do we have the desire to change? If so, do we have the time to implement changes? These questions will be addressed in the remainder of this paper.

The Status of Adaptability Training in the Army Today

As stated earlier, numerous Army documents state a requirement for Soldiers to be adaptive and innovative. FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, states leaders need to be innovative. Innovation is the, "creativity in the production of ideas that are original and worthwhile."[45] It further requires training to adapt and states that the competence, confidence, and discipline Soldiers get from training will enable leaders to adapt to changing situations[46]. However, the FM does not describe how or when to train adaptability.

Further, Army Regulation 350-1, in its discussion of leader development, identifies three pillars for developing adaptive leaders--institutional training and education, operational assignments, and self development[47]. Again, there is no mention of how or when this will occur.

Recently, the Army stated that we need to develop our leaders into Pentathletes. A Pentathlete is:

> a strategic and creative thinker; a builder and leader of teams who is competent across the full spectrum of operations; effective in large organizations; skilled in governance and diplomacy, who understands the cultural context of situations, and can work across them.   He/she sets the standard; is confident and competent; a prudent risk taker; innovative; adaptive; empathetic; educated and is an effective communicator[48].

This is clearly a call for adaptive leaders, but again there is no roadmap.

The conclusion this paper draws is that there is no directive roadmap that states what an adaptive leader, Soldier or unit looks like or how to develop these qualities in our formations. It is left to individual units and schools to define adaptability and to educate accordingly with appropriate feedback.

The ARFORGEN Model – when to train

The Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model is an attempt to synchronize planning, resourcing, and execution for continuous operations[49]. It is an attempt to provide regularity to deployment and training tempo. Soldiers will have the knowledge of when they will be away from home and can provide some regularity to their families[50]. Commanders will also know when their units will deploy and can construct training plans accordingly[51]. The plan will have Active Army units deploying once about every three years and Reserve/National Guard units deploying about every six years[52].

One phase of the ARFORGEN model is the "Reset/Train" phase. This is when units are recently redeployed from long operations and are directed to train and reset. This phase should last for approximately one year[53]. However, based on the new surge of units in Iraq and the call for a larger Army and Marine Corps it does not appear as if the Army will be able to meet the requirements of the ARFORGEN model and units will have to "make time" to educate for adaptability[54].

This is not to say that Army units do not train adaptability on a regular basis. However, it is clear that it is not formalized in any forum that can be found through research. This is too critical a task and requirement to be left to units to conduct on their own. Solutions need to be top driven.

Conclusions – Can We Do This?

Soldiers and units are adapting to the situation on the ground in Iraq, however this is by natural instinct and not by training. The Army must educate in order to have adaptive leaders and institutions to give all Soldiers and units the same advantage upon deployment. It is is too critical a skill to be left to chance. However, how and what to train still remains a conundrum that must be addressed.

The questions that must be answered are: 1) are the conditions set in the Army to train adaptability? 2) do we have innovative leaders and a culture that encourages adaptation and innovation? and 3) do we have a desire to learn from past experiences? This paper concludes the answer is yes to all of the above.

Culturally, the Army is embracing adaptation and innovation. The 2005 Army Posture Statement laid the groundwork for leaders to embrace innovation. The document encourages leaders throughout the chain of command to adapt and innovate. The conditions are set - the key is to ensure units and leaders embrace this guidance.

The Army has innovative leaders throughout its ranks. From the Chief of Staff of the Army to the Army's junior leaders Soldiers innovate. Moving from a division-centric formation to a brigade-centric formation, rebalancing active and reserve component forces, stabilizing Soldiers in units and the development of the ARFORGEN model are several example of initiatives demonstrating the Army leadership's adaptability.

At the tactical level Dr. Leonard Wong's conclusion is that, 'today's junior officers are not afraid to lead in ambiguous conditions. They can execute a mission with minimal guidance. They are an incredibly valuable resource to a transforming Army that has desired and sought adaptive capacity in its leaders. The crucible of IOF has delivered to the Army a cohort of adaptive leaders[55]."

Does the Army have a desire to learn from past experiences? It appears as if the answer is also, yes. Although the Army has not historically embraced After Action Reviews[56], it appears to be learning lessons from the current conflict. This can be seen in many instances to include how the Army has changed as portrayed in the 2005 Army Posture Statement and how we are changing America's course in Iraq to defeat the enemy threat[57].

Clearly, creating educated individuals and institutions is possible. The question then becomes what should we do?

<u>Conclusion – What Should be Done?</u>

This paper recommends several possible methodologies to ensure our Soldiers and units are educated in adaptability. These recommendations can be implemented at all levels to ensure units understand the operating environment and can adapt accordingly. Taken together these recommendations will start the Army on a path towards having adaptive units.

First, the Army needs to train units beyond the simple "task, condition, standard" model as outlined in FM 7-0[58]. This is an effective method of training what Soldiers and units need to know or *what to think*. However, it does not provide the education Soldiers and units need to be able to adapt on the battlefield or *how to think*.

Mintzberg recommends a more appropriate method for training adaptability in his model for his International Masters in Practicing Management (IMPM) program. His program uses a methodology similar to a seminar vice learning by rote[59]. This requires students to think about the topic, prepare to discuss it, and defend their positions. In the end they are required to reflect upon their thoughts. In many instances they are also required to reflect long after graduation[60].

This methodology is similar to one recommended and implemented by Vandergriff at the Georgetown University ROTC program where cadets are using scenario-driven exercises to hone their decision-making skills vice learning in a classroom by rote[61]. This allows cadets to make decisions where they are allowed to fail within a safe, face-saving environment. It also requires that they find the answers to questions themselves and the lessons are "emotionally marked in time[62]." That is to say that failure ensures the lesson is learned and remembered by all cadets that are participating vice training cadets by older methods.

This training method eliminates the task, condition, and standard methodology for training in adaptability. Units will be given situations where creative solutions are required. Junior leaders can lead their organizations through the myriad of options. This will generate discussion where all opinions can he heard. This will allow for the vetting of ideas at all levels and help ensure that later, when short-notice decisions are required, Soldiers understand the methodologies used to arrive at decisions and makes them part of the process.

Second, the Army needs to adapt the above methodology to the lowest levels possible. Middle level officers and senior officers are afforded the opportunity to train in a seminar environment. At both Intermediate Level Education (ILE) and Senior Staff College (SSC) students operate in a small group environment and discuss/solve problems in a relatively safe environment. The Army needs to develop a practice of providing this methodology to lower levels of the chain of command. This will require an investment in time, equipment and

feedback mechanisms to ensure Soldiers are educated to a level required by the unit commander and commensurate with the level of complexity of that unit's next mission.

Two requirements to getting this right are time and command climate. Sergeant's Time Training is a block of time allocated to non-commissioned officers, usually on a weekly basis, to perform those training tasks they deem critical to the functioning of their unit. Units must be given time during Sergeant's Time Training to have these seminars. Allowing junior Soldiers to provide input will not only allow senior leaders to learn, it will allow Soldiers to become part of the process. Once Soldiers take this leap it is critical that the chain of command actually listen to their input and either incorporate it or explain why it may not pertain to the problem at hand.

Third, the ARFORGEN model must be fixed. Units are not spending one year deployed and two in garrison for training/reset and in the ready pool[63]. Units need their full two years in garrison in order to reset and train to achieve full METL capability required of full spectrum operations[64].

The ability to perform mission essential tasks is at the heart of tactical unit training programs. When compiled, these mission essential tasks make up the Mission Essential Task List (METL). ARFORGEN assumes a drawdown from OIF/OEF[65] with the current force structure in place. Either we need to implement the drawdown of forces in OIF/OEF or increase the size of the Army in order to meet our requirements to provide forces and train to achieve full METL capability as required for full spectrum operations.

If Soldiers and units are not given the requisite amount of time to train on all tasks some tasks will just not get done. Units will tend to focus on those tasks that are quantifiable since those are easiest to justify. They also form the core of training requirements for the CENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). Seminar training at unit and below level will potentially be the first thing that unit commanders and leaders decide to neglect as it is not measurable and initially provides no feedback.

Fourth, Army units from squad on up need to ensure after action reviews (AAR) are given their proper place in the training cycle. AARs are conducted to determine; what was supposed to happen, what did happen, what went right or wrong, and how things should be done differently next time[66]. AARs occur at all echelons up to and including the Chief of Staff and Combatant Commanders.

Although doctrine requires AARs, they are not always done to standard[67]. Units must be trained on how to conduct AARs and then given the requisite amount of time to conduct them properly. They must not be "sanitized for political correctness" but be a hard look at what the unit did right and needs to improve on.

How much time is required for an AAR is clearly dependent on the event being reviewed. In higher headquarters these self-criticizing events take on a life of their own. In smaller units this can be a simple "check the block" event. What we need at the lower levels is more of a critique[68]. <u>This may take up to fifty percent of the allocated training time.</u> However, based on the importance of the outcome this may be what is required to get this right.

AARs can even be the topic for seminars as discussed in the first recommendation. This will allow for a complete vetting of all ideas on an event that everybody in the seminar participated in. This common experience would make the seminar that much more worthwhile.

Finally, the Army needs to ensure their cadres of instructors have experience in units that have had to adapt in order to impart that knowledge to their students. Transformational experiences (called crucibles) enable leadership ability to emerge. These experiences, "can be terrible, such as a war, or benign, such as a mentor-protégée relationship. Leaders survive their crucibles and create positive meaning out of them[69]." These leaders need to be brought into the schoolhouse to impart experience and educate those students "who know more than their instructors".

The British did something similar during World War II with their pilots. Pilots with combat experience were constantly cycled in as instructors to educate trainee pilots in order to reduce the attrition rate of newly minted pilots on the front lines[70]. This system kept a fresh supply of experienced pilots in the air and ensured new pilots had some experience to draw from before they were sent into battle.

These recommendations are not a complete guide to developing and maintaining adaptable leaders, Soldiers and units. However, taken together they can assist the Army in its endeavor to develop units that can operate independently on the battlefield and not take high casualties upon their initial employment.

<u>Endnotes</u>

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